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Intelligence data vital, Meyer says

By Bill Gertz
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Large U.S. corporations need better intelligence and information to compete worldwide during the current period of unprecedented scientific and economic change, according to a former high-ranking CIA official.

Herbert E. Meyer, who until this year directed inter-agency intelligence analysis at the CIA's National Intelligence Council, recently established a private consulting firm with former White House science adviser George A. Keyworth II. They specialize in corporate intelligence systems to business.

The intelligence field is one of the few areas where the federal government is ahead of the private sector, Mr. Meyer said in a luncheon with editors and reporters at The Washington Times.

"One of the things vital to guiding an enterprise through a period of change is organized information — and that's intelligence," he said. "We are on the verge of the most spectacular sustained boom in economic history. The question is whether the United States will continue to be the leader."

Mr. Meyer and Mr. Keyworth will help clients organize, evaluate and use scientific, technological, economic and political information.

"And that's what intelligence is — organized information," Mr. Meyer said. "What do you need to know to achieve your objectives?"

Currently very few American companies have established intelligence divisions, with the exception of some large companies, such as the Exxon Corp., Mr. Meyer said.

On the subject of world affairs, Mr. Meyer, who describes himself as inveterate optimist, called China's modernization "the most exciting, spectacular development on the planet Earth."

He stated that the modernization process is irreversible, and will endure beyond the reign of China's leader Deng Xiaoping.

"I think it is increasingly naive to think that what he is doing is reversible," Mr. Meyer said. "What China is doing is using every dollar it can get its hands on to build a modern society."

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He predicted that by the end of the century, China would have the world's second-highest gross national product, if present trends continue.

Mr. Meyer said China's recent economic growth contrasts sharply with a declining Soviet economy because of China's "explicit recognition that freedom and success are linked."

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, continues to loom as "the greatest menace to civilization," he stated.

"They're in trouble, but they are immensely powerful," Mr. Meyer said. "Their military power is growing and that remains a threat that hasn't diminished one bit, nor will it in the immediate future."

Recent decades, he said, have witnessed the rejection of totalitarian ideas, such as communism and fascism, and a growing movement toward political and economic systems capable of delivering economic prosperity.

"Freedom works; totalitarianism does not," Mr. Meyer said. "What is astonishing is that communism is dying not because it's repugnant — and it is — it's dying because it doesn't deliver the goods."

Mr. Meyer, who, as vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council, espoused the notion that the Soviet Union is on the decline as a superpower, believes the primary policy goal of the United States should be managing that decline without nuclear war.

He foresees three options for the Soviet Union in the future: "One, they can try [to] act decisively while they still can — that's the bolt from the blue. Secondly, they can undertake fundamental, historic reform, and the third is that in some fashion they can ride it down."

For this reason, he described Mr. Reagan's space-based strategic defense program as "the most monumental example" of the administration's policy of managing stable change in the world.

"What the administration recognized is that stability is eroding, and is going to be eroding over a period of years," Mr. Meyer said. "SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] is a very good attempt to build back in that stability."